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Transcript of a sound recording in MS 608, WLBZ Radio Station Records, Bangor, Maine, 1931-1973

Title: Northeast Airlines DC-6B Scenic Flight Over Northern and Eastern Maine

Date: March 25, 1957

Recording number: Tape 20, part 1

Length of recording: 28:53

[transcript begins]

MINCHER: The noise that you're hearing at the moment, although I'm in a Northeast Airlines plane, a brand new DC-6B, is not the noise of the motors, probably, because this is one of the quietest planes that I have ever been on. We're standing here way up forward directly behind the, where the pilot and the copilot and flight engineer are sitting. I'm surrounded by radio and radar equipment and I have a hunch that it's motor generators making the slight noise that you hear in the background. But to find out about this flight first and about the plane, let's talk with the Mr. George B. Steers, the Operation Manager of Northeast Airlines. And, I imagine, Mr. Steers that you're from Boston, is that right?

STEERS: That is correct, yes.

MINCHER: Now this plane is, well, it's very new. Just how new is it?

STEERS: Well this airplane was delivered to Northeast Airlines just a week ago today from Santa Monica, California. It made a nonstop flight across the United States in approximately 7 hours and 55 minutes.

MINCHER: We took off from Bangor, by the way, today happens to be the 25th of March. The time right now, as I'm speaking, is just about 30 seconds before 1:00, and we are up over Mount Katahdin. We've been circling around here so that the approximately 60 municipal officials, representatives of Dow Air Force Base, and also of hotels, motels, travel agencies, news media, and so on, who have been taken on this courtesy flight by Northeast Airlines so that they could get a good view of Mount Katahdin from the air. And at this time of the year it certainly is a beautiful jewel, snow-capped. Not at the best condition for climbing, but looking down at it makes you think of the remark by some of the world's most famous mountain climbers, that someone was asked why he wanted to climb Mount Everest and he said simply because it's there. And seeing Mount Katahdin from the air gives you pretty much that same impression. To talk about this plane just a little bit more, it's fascinating to me that especially

on this flight, because naturally when riding on Northeast Airlines before, I've never been up forward. It's been more less forbidden territory, and of course to the general public, it is. However, this is a familiarization flight and Northeast wants us to learn about this plane which is going to mean a great deal to Maine. It may seem as if the acquisition of a new airplane by an airline is perhaps something that's good for the airline and that's just about all there is to it, but of course that's not so. Because the better service an airline can provide into and out of an area, and this plane, I understand, is going to be flying into Bangor and Portland later on this year, the better service an airline can provide, the more people will use the airlines, and more people will come in and out of the area, the more convenient it is for business and that's a big thing. And of course to paraphrase Defense Secretary Charles Wilson just a slight bit, what's good for business is good for any local area. Mr. Steers, when does Northeast plan to get this DC-6B on to regular service in and out of Bangor?

STEERS: This particular airplane will be scheduled in and out of Bangor on our June 27th schedule change.

MINCHER: Well, let's talk just for a moment about what an Operations Manager does. The public, of course, reads and hears about, well, for example, about you, Operation Manager of Northeast Airlines. What does your work consist?

STEERS: Well, I'm in charge of the general overall operation of the airline, coordination with the CAA. We make up let-down procedures for the various and sundry airports that we operate into. A direct responsibility for the training of flight crews, the maintenance of flight crew proficiency and, oh, there's 101 different things that come under the wing of the operations manager. Its overseeing the operation from start to finish. The dispatching of the flights, as well as the operation of the flights.

MINCHER: Is passenger, with Northeast, is passenger traffic, that's a term that I just made up I guess, is that something that's different from operations? You are concerned mainly with the flights, and not so much with the passengers, is that right?

STEERS: Yeah, that's right. My chief concern is the operation of the airplanes themselves and the traffic department concerns themselves with the handling of passengers.

MINCHER: Well, now to find out a little bit about some of the equipment in the plane here. Can you tell me or would you recommend that I speak to somebody else about it?

STEERS: Oh, I can tell you about most anything you want to know about this particular airplane. However, Captain Dunn might like to give you a description of the airplane that he's very proud of, I know.

MINCHER: All right, thank you very much, Mr. Steers. I may return to you in just a moment, too. Now this is going to take just a little bit of clambering because I'm located ... the way the pilot and co-pilot sit in this plane, they are, of course, up forward and in the doorway just behind them are the throttles, many of the controls. In the doorway, there is another seat and that is being occupied by I think the flight engineer. Captain Dunn, Mr. Steers just said that if we wanted to find out something about this airplane, the best thing to do would be to talk to you.

DUNN: Yes, sir.

MINCHER: Can you drive no hands for a moment?

DUNN: Certainly.

MINCHER: Would you tell us something about the plane, its capabilities and Mr. Steers said that you are very proud of this plane. Maybe you can tell us why.

DUNN: Well, yes, this DC-6B is the last word in high-speed passenger transportation, air transportation. It's capable of flying at altitudes up to 20,000 feet carrying a very low cabin altitude so that we can go high and enjoy the smooth air at that height and also the increased airplane performance. At the present time we're flying this at 12,000 feet. Our cabin is at 500 feet. We're using a normal cruise horsepower which gives us a total horsepower of 4800, that is we're using 4,800 horsepower from the four engines to cruise at the present time. This is giving us a true airspeed of 300 miles an hour so that we could cover quite a bit of ground in one hour.

MINCHER: As a, when I first started speaking, by the way, just a few moments ago to Mr. Steers, we were over Mount Katahdin, and I dare say that at 300 miles an hour, we have progressed a little bit since there. The captain's moving his seat back so he can hear me. I said just a moment ago that when I started to talk... oh, you can hear better in this slight amount of sound than I can apparently. Where are we now? At 300 miles an hour, we must have come some distance from Mt. Katahdin.

DUNN: That's right, we're approaching the Grand Lake area now and the whole network of lakes, we're going to fly over it, and then down toward the Machias River, down over the coast of Maine and over toward Bar Harbor.

MINCHER: Now I noticed that, uh, when I was this service I used to work with radar, and I see a couple of radar scopes here. Can you tell me something about that?

DUNN: That, of course, is something that Northeast has adapted for the protection of passengers and also so that you'll know just exactly where you're flying and ...

MINCHER: We're getting instructions behind us, by the way. The public address system is being used on this flight to point out to the passengers aboard just where we are and some of the points of interest and so on and flight engineer or the copilot was just giving some instructions. What about the radar? When do you use it? Do you use it most of the time, and how beneficial do you think it is?

DUNN: Yes, the radar is a wonderful, in my estimation, it's the greatest advance we've had in the past ten years in this type of work. We can use the radar for two purposes. One is where there are some variants whether thunderstorms or cumulus clouds, and they, along our way we can avoid flying through them, through thunderstorms, which this radar will pick up thunderstorm cells, so that we can avoid flying through them. And of course the rough air that's associated with thunderstorms. Also we can use the radar for ground mapping. We can tilt the antenna downward and the radar is available to ground map, at which point we could, very much like television, we can see the ones below us, lakes, shorelines and so forth, right on the radar scope. This wonderful innovation for our air safety.

MINCHER: Does this plane have anything besides radar as far as, well, recent developments in instrumentation are concerned?

I got in the way of the communications microphone, right before ... but did you hear my question Captain Dunn?

DUNN: Yes, I did, sir. Well, we have complete radio complement including a new item that is called cell call. And with this device we no longer, it is no longer necessary for us to monitor all the frequencies all the time orally. With this so-called device, it rings a loud a bell which indicates that we are to communicate with a ground station.

MINCHER: Well thank you very much, Captain Dunn. I can't remember whether I introduced Captain Dunn by name. This is Captain W. J. Dunn. And where is your home, Captain?

DUNN: I live in Melrose, Massachusetts.

MINCHER: Okay, well let's move over now. The next man on the right, I expect, is the flight engineer, and I have his name listed here as Bill Donohue. Is that right?

DONAHUE: That's correct.

MINCHER: Well, you are responsible, part of the time at least, for that a great deal of the flying of this aircraft. Could you tell us about it, basically what your job is?

DONAHUE: Well, my job is running the engines as far as, more than running the engines are the captain's orders throughout the takeoff, climb, and cruise configuration for the airplane,

controlling the amount of fuel being used and the horsepower being drawn out of the engines. Right now, as the captain stated, we're drawing 1200 horse power per engine on and we're cruising at 300 miles an hour.

MINCHER: Well now, you have flown, obviously, for quite some time. What is it about this DC-6B that you like especially? Have you found anything yet?

DONAHUE: Well, we haven't found anything we don't like with the airplane. It's just about tops in modern air transportation.

MINCHER: Would you say that by and large the the controls, for example, the ones that you have to use here, are they fairly standardized among modern airplanes? Of course, they're all designed for convenience, efficiency, and as fast operation as is possible, but there anything special about this one that you like?

DONAHUE: Well, it has the last word in control simplicity. The propeller controls, for instance, are controlled by a master synchronization lever which permits you to operate all four propellers at one time, which makes for a smoother and quieter operation and less passenger discomfort.

MINCHER: Well, I'm going to continue the same line of questioning that I had before and talk for just a moment to the copilot, who is Howard Holman. He, at the moment, he wasn't aware that I was going to interview him. He's talking to the pilot, Captain Dunn. Looks to me they're caught up in a conversation about fishing and I think that if we're going to keep on going here, at this time, I'm gonna have to interrupt. Captain Holman, I wonder if I could ask you as I have the others up here, up forward, what is there especially that you like about this plane?

HOLMAN: Why, so many things I like about it. It's kind of a hard to think of any one thing in particular. It's got performance, it's got load-carrying ability, it's the pilots airplane all the way through.

MINCHER: Well it's pretty much the passenger's airplane too, from the comforts that I've noticed back there. It's really very quiet, it rides very gently, with four big engines you can't hear very much in there. People have perhaps noticing sound in the background right now. That is the cause of the fact that we're up here in the working quarters, up in the cabin, where the controls are and they don't care too much about noise up here anyway, because they're working with earphones. Have you noticed, have you thought of something else that you wanted to say?

HOLMAN: Well one of the reasons why this airplane is more quiet than those of other companies is that we have an additional 500 pounds of soundproofing in the cabin. This is a

special airplane made for Douglas, and it's quieter than the usual DC-6B. And it makes it very comfortable for the passengers and we think that everybody will appreciate the quietness of this plane.

MINCHER: I can practically guarantee that. I would like to ask you where we are right now.

HOLMAN: Uh, right now we're over the Machias Lake District in the vicinity of Princeton, Maine. Just passed over Grand Lake or Compass Lake and did Machias Lake. We're cruising down the Machias River and we've come out on the ocean here very shortly which you can see ahead. Passed over the famous Airline Road that runs between Bangor and Calais just a second ago.

MINCHER: Okay, thank you very much. Well, we'll move on now and you will notice, I'll keep the recorder going if I possibly can, because naturally Northeast Airlines is proud of this plane and wants to show it off. And we, looking upon the advent the DC-6B of Northeast Airlines as a really newsworthy event, in that it is going to mean a great deal to the state of Maine, not only on flights way down south to Miami and so forth, but also from Boston and other points up in this section, I would like to show you how the noise quiets down. We're up here where there is some noisy equipment, up forward, in the control cabin. Now I'm moved back. At the present time you'll probably notice the noise drop off. We've move back into the passenger compartment. There is a small cabin which can accommodate eight persons up forward. I'm going to move back just a little bit farther, where all of my fellow passengers here who aren't working at the moment are enjoying some food. Looking for Captain Steers. I found out, by the way, since I last spoke with him that Captain Steers is a former chief pilot of Northeast Airlines. I was going to talk to him just a moment ago, in just a minute, ah, here he comes. I wanted to get to a point to show you how a quiet this plane is exactly between the engines and I think that we're just about here now. Well, I would say about six feet from my left is one engine, one of the two starboard engines, and about six feet on my right, I'm facing the rear of the plane, is the nearest one of the other two engines. And each of these engines has, I believe, 1200 horsepower. Is that right, Captain Steers?

STEERS: No, they develop 2400 horsepower on takeoff at sea level and right now each engine is putting out 1200 horsepower at this altitude.

MNCHER: I got confused but I think any of the people who are listening can notice that this is very much quieter back here than it was in our previous interview up forward where, well, the people that are working up there don't care too much about whether there's a little noise or not. They mostly wear earphones, anyway, don't they?

STEERS: That's right. We wear earphones 95% of the time

MINCHER: And, as a matter of fact, none of your communications equipment up there uses a loudspeaker system at all, does it? Isn't it all phones?

STEERS: At the present time, yes, but eventually we will have cockpit loudspeakers installed. We have those in our Convair equipment the present time.

MINCHER: Is, what's that for? More or less routine?

STEERS: Well actually, it's more routine reception under good weather conditions. It's a little easier on the crews, and lessens fatigue, pilot fatigue, a little bit. You're not sitting there with the headset on all the time.

MINCHER: Right. Well, I think that I'll go back. I'm beginning to get a little bit hungry, to tell you the truth, and I think I'll go back and see if I can catch one of the stewardesses. We have at least two on this flight, and find out how they like this plane and talk to a few passengers, too. And then see if there's any food left.

STEERS: I know Mr. Howe, the chef back there, will take real good care of you.

MINCHER: Thank you, Captain Steers. Moving aft now down the center of the plane, which is very spacious, there are two seats side-by-side, two rows of seats side-by-side, on each side of the plane. Everyone seems to be very comfortable. They're polishing off what looks to be very good food. The stewardesses are very busy, but I'm going to see if I can catch one here in just a minute for just a moment. They're still serving food. I hope you'll save one of those for me. Could I talk to you for just a minute?

BURKE: Yes, okay.

MINCHER: What do you like about this plane?

BURKE: Oh, it's just beautiful to serve, and everything is so handy, and so comfortable.

MINCHER: Is there more room, that is, as far from your point of view?

BURKE: Oh, definitely.

MINCHER: Of course there is from the passenger's point of view. It's an extremely comfortable plane.

BURKE: Certainly is, yeah. Everything is very handy.

MINCHER: Does the engine noise and so forth from planes which aren't so quiet, does it bother you folks at all, any, that is, who are working in the plane?

BURKE: Well, we're so used to it I guess we don't even notice it anymore but I imagine the passengers coming in notice the quietness of the ship

MINCHER: Well, this one that this one here, that's right

BURKE: It's beautiful.

MINCHER: Ordinarily, it's a little difficult to hold a conversation, but we're speaking in a normal tone of voice and it's just as easy as can be. What's your name, by the way?

BURKE: Miss Burke, Ann Burke.

MINCHER: And where are you from?

BURKE: East Boston, Massachusetts.

MINCHER: East Boston, okay.

BURKE: I'm sorry I couldn't give you any more time, we're awful busy.

MINCHER: Okay, well I guess I can't quite catch the other one and the chef here is very busy and I can see by the expression on his face that I better not bother him, so I think that when I probably better do here now is, as soon as I get a chance, sidle out of the way and settle for a meal myself. Everyone here on the plane is enjoying himself, I know. It's a beautiful day. There are a few clouds around which to me always adds to a flight. I haven't had too much chance to look outside myself because for the last 20 minutes or so I've been reasonably busy. I'm going to drop around here now and see if I can get some points of view. I'm breaking in the mealtime, I realize, but here's Bangor City Manager, Joseph R. Coupal, Jr., and I would like to ask him, everybody likes the plane, Joe. There's nothing to be said as far as that's concerned but, just what do you think? What's your impression of this guest flight?

COUPAL: Well, course, Bill, to me the overriding of the feeling that I get, is that this is a great thing for Bangor and northeastern Maine, to have this type of aircraft operating out of Bangor. This type of service being provided by Northeast Airlines, it's something that we've all worked very hard for and it's gratifying to see it really coming into fruition. And I have to agree with everybody else. This is a great aircraft, isn't it?

MINCHER: It certainly is. The fact is, I said a short time ago, we look upon this flight and the advent of the DC-6B to Northeast Airlines as being more than just the fact that an airline has decided to get a new airplane. It means a great deal to the area which is going to be served, or which is served of course, by the the airline using the plane. And another of the passengers here is Norbert X. Dowd, the Executive Secretary of the Bangor Chamber of Commerce. What

do you think that the Northeast Airlines' progressive move in getting these at least ten DC-6Bs, of which this one is the third, what do you think this will mean to the area, Norbie?

DOWD: Well of course anything of this nature, particularly when I can recommend the food that they're serving right now, Bill, will be excellent for the area served by Northeast. I think that it'd be nice to congratulate the Northeast Airlines for their forward look, for the splendid job that they're doing in providing a service of this type for the people of eastern and northern Maine and for our Bangor people in particular. We are very happy at the fact that in the past in the proceedings requesting the extinction of the line of Northeast to Florida, that we had a very definite part in that request for the extension. And this flight today and this beautiful plane, with its new type of operation, is the culmination of that effort that is made by all of the people of Maine and the various organizations in trying to arrange for the extension of the flight. And so we congratulate Northeast and we are quite sure that the people of Maine will certainly make use of the excellent service that's offered by this line.

MINCHER: Thank you, Norbie. Trust the Chamber Commerce, by the way, to notice the very good food. To get a view from the opposite side of the river, so to speak, I notice back here a little ways the City Manager of Brewer, Don Waring, and he is currently being served with food by, well now here's another manager. Ralph Eye. Ralph, you're now in Bar Harbor, and I wonder if you could sum up what you think of this plane and what you think it is going to mean to people here in Maine.

EYE: Well, I think that this type of aircraft and the type of service that Northeast is now able to give us will definitely be a big economic advantage to the Bangor area and to all of Maine. There's no question but we're going to get better service, we're going to get more passengers, and this means more to us here in Maine from the economic point of view. Over the course of the years, why it'll be developing, be beginning to get air cargo and the Bar Harbor airport, among other, things will expand along with the tourist trade.

Thank you very much. When I started out, before I saw Mr. Eye here, I was thinking of Don Waring, wearing the City Manager of Brewer, and Brewer is one of the areas which is of course going to benefit immediately, being so close to the Bangor Airport. And I wonder, Mr. Waring, if you could sum up for us what you think of this plane and also what you think of the how it's going to expand Northeast service to this area, and maybe even a prediction as to what the area can expect.

WARING: Thank you, Bill. I know I'm speaking for Charlie Fuller of the Development Committee and Mary Ivers, the mayor of Brewer, but this is one of the most luxurious flights that I have ever had the chance to take. Everything is A-1 on this Northeast flight. As far as the entire, I think that this is just one of the steps forward that will make the Bangor-Brewer area

the fastest-growing community area in the entire state and we have nothing to look forward to but the best in the future. Thank you once again, Bill, for this fine flight, and we know that everyone along with us is enjoying it 100%.

Thank you, Mr. Waring. That was Donald Waring, City Manager of Brewer. And we are coming just about to the end of our tape here now, and I am getting very, very hungry. There is still a little bit of food left, so I think we will call things quits here now and I'll sit down and enjoy a meal and also the beautiful view which can be seen from about 12,000 feet over Maine. We're down off the coast right now. So, never with greater relief have I said, this is the Maine Broadcasting Company.

[transcript ends]

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